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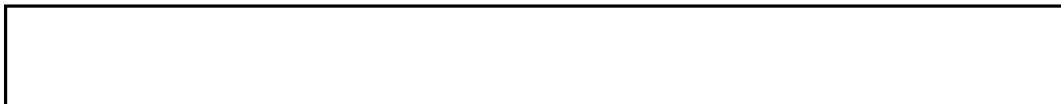
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[Vietnam: South Vietnamese forces engaged in several sharp firefights over the weekend with North Vietnamese regulars recently introduced into the western reaches of the Mekong Delta, but ground action elsewhere in the country remained at a low level.

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The Communists loosed a flood of propaganda during the weekend attacking the latest announcement of US troop withdrawals and President Nixon's address to the UN General Assembly. Hanoi probably believed that a strong counterattack was called for to undercut any impression that recent allied moves put the Communists under pressure to do something concrete themselves.

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LAOS: Current Situation



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Laos: The government offensive in north Laos is still stalled as enemy resistance stiffens.

General Vang Pao's forces have been unable to secure the high ground north of the Plaine des Jarres, where substantial numbers of North Vietnamese troops are dug in. Several small but sharp Communist counterattacks have kept government troops off balance in the northwest portion of the Plaine and in the vital area near the Route 7/71 junction. The government hopes to hold this latter area as long as possible to forestall enemy reinforcement from North Vietnam.

Time is on the Communists' side, however. Heavy rains, which have considerably reduced the enemy's ability to supply front-line troops, will begin to taper off in the next few weeks, permitting them to bring in fresh troops from North Vietnam if they choose to do so. Increasing weariness of government troops, who have been on the offensive without relief for over a month, may also become a factor in the enemy's favor.

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South Korea: President Pak faces further hurdles on the third-term issue.

The maneuver by which the government sneaked the third-term amendment bill through an irregular session of the National Assembly in the wee hours of 14 September has backfired. The public outcry is helping forces opposing the constitutional amendment which is to be voted on in a national referendum expected late next month. According to the US Embassy, a majority of the public probably now opposes the amendment. There is considerable opposition even in the countryside, a traditional government stronghold.

Students continue to demonstrate against a third term for Pak, despite the imposition of stiffer penalties. With most universities closed, high school students have assumed the lead. This poses greater problems for the government because school rivalries activate larger numbers of students, many of whom are more reckless than the college students. Moreover, rough handling by the police is apt to provoke greater public protest in the case of younger students. The police have been using tear gas, but the government is alive to the danger of making martyrs for the opposition to exploit.

The proposed four or five weeks before the referendum may not give Pak time to develop sufficient support to ensure a substantial victory. Opportunities for rigging the referendum are fewer than in previous elections, although the government does have subtle means of bringing pressure prior to the vote and the referendum could be further postponed. A defeat would bring Pak's resignation and a period of instability. Even a legitimate victory would be challenged by the opposition, which is branding the amendment bill illegal and which is already calling for the overthrow of the Pak government.

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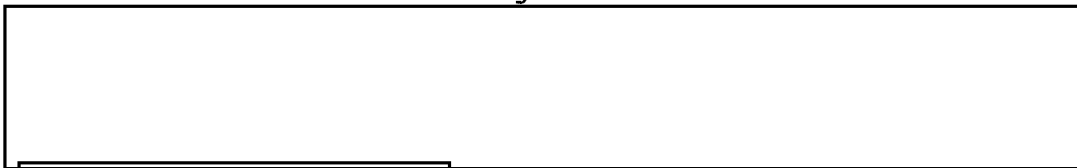
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Guatemala - British Honduras: The Guatemalan Government is showing increasing concern over the apparent determination of British Honduran Premier Price to achieve quick independence.

An emergent public debate over how to pursue the Guatemalan claim to Belize (British Honduras) may make the issue appealing to the three candidates seeking the Guatemalan presidency in the elections next March. Col. Carlos Arana, standard bearer for the right-wing National Liberation Movement, has already promised to continue to fight for the "restoration" of Belize and has suggested resettling El Salvador's excess population and other Spanish-speaking people in Belize. The other opposition candidate, Jorge Lucas Caballeros of the Christian Democratic Party, has been quick to move in on issues with potential political payoff and may also recognize Belize as a subject to rouse the electorate, which has so far shown little interest in the campaigning of any of the presidential hopefuls.

The nationalistic rhetoric of the campaign could easily push the government toward a hawkish position regarding British Honduras. President Mendez and the government candidate, Mario Fuentes Pierrucini, are aware of the implications of raising the Belize problem during the campaign, but neither can afford to show less "patriotism" if both Arana and Caballeros take strong stands on the issue.



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NOTES

Islamic Summit: The Islamic Summit, organized by Moroccan King Hassan and Saudi King Faisal, is convening today in Rabat despite President Nasir's efforts to have the meeting postponed. Thirty-five Arab, Asian, and African chiefs of state were invited to the three-day meeting that was called to discuss the burning of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the protection of Moslem holy places in Israeli-occupied territory. Some 25 participants, including at least ten chiefs of state, are expected to attend. Hassan hopes that the conference will contribute to developing a more moderate approach to the Arab-Israeli issue.

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